

A  
METHODE

To Gain  
Satisfaction



IN  
RELIGION.

Proposed Occasionally in a Letter to a  
FRIEND.

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*Τὰ ἐνθὺ λόγῳ περὶεῖται, καὶ Θεῷ ταυτὶν ἰσὺς, Hierocles.*

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By J. P. Philologos.

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March 12. 167 $\frac{2}{3}$ .

SIR,

**N**O sooner did sleep this morning peep out of the door of my Senses, but you opened the door of my Chamber, about the time when the ushering beams of the Sun began to guild our Heavens: my vigilant Soul then taking her place to acquaint all my faculties, she no sooner darted out a short Ejaculation to her Maker, but what was casually discoursed of last night, was presented to my thoughts: I considered how uncouth and strang that very methode of searching after the truths of Religion seem'd to you, which to me hath been the Pool Star to direct my trembling mind, and from which no other Arguments (I could yet meet with) could ever entice my Reason to make any variation: which made me again reflect, that God is as much to be admired for the various genius of men, as for their different Physiognomy: that there may be Garments of divers fashions cut out of one peice of Stuff: the same faith may be held upon different Ratiotinations: But since, *Sir*, by this method I reaped so great satisfaction my self, I could not choose (out of a sence of your zealous enquiry after the same truths,

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and your seeming Concessions to them ) but to offer these, whereby my meaning may be more intelligible, Discourings being often liable to misapprehensions: My Relative Respect due to you hath been a further enforcement to acquaint you, with what hath proved so satisfactory to me, though not so methodically, as (perhaps) I might have done, if I had took more time, or so strongly, as if I had had the conveniency of those helps, I have sometimes had: However, upon the aforesaid Considerations, I present you with the following Severalls.

(1.) I at first considered with my self, that all *Superstructures* must needs be sandy and weak, whose foundation is not surely layed: And he that desires to be satisfied in *Religion*, ought to begin with searching out, and establishing the *grounds* on which *Religion* is built.

(2.) There are two things from whence the *Existence* of *Religion* is to be concluded, viz. *Revelation* and *Reason*; by *Reason* I understand a natural inbred Principle of Truth wrought upon the Soul by *Revelation*, the Mind or Will of God comming immediately from himself, or from those who were divinely inspired by him.

(3.) The *Being* of a *God* is to be presupposed to *Faith* in *Revelation*: *Revelation* supposes the *being* of a *God*, but cannot prove it: For we can have no security, that the *Revelation* is true, till we are assured it is from *God*.

(4.) The Fundamental Proof of the *Being* of a *God*, is *Right Reason*: the *Apostle* acknowledgeth the *Existence* of *God* to be proved by those inbred Notices which

which *God* hath *naturally* planted in the *Soules* of *all* mankind, the *Heathen* not excepted, *Rom.* 1. 19. what matter the *Beauty*, *Order* and *usefulness* of the *Creatures* do afford us, for *Religious* acknowledgment, is *naturally rational*: And whatsoever *Revelation* yeilds us for the same, is as truly *rational* as that: for when we are once convinc'd of the *Divine* Authority of the *Revelation*, *meer Reason* will force us to its assent. Why *God* is to be believed, when he hath *Revealed* any thing, is not a *Task* for a *Rational* Creature, however for any that owne *Christianity*.

(5.) So that the *first* and main thing, that my *inquisitive Mind* sought to be satisfied in, was to assure *my self* of the *Divine* Authority of *S. Scripture*, which was *Divine Revelation*; what it was, *Christ* hath taught:

(6.) Though *Scripture* be *Sufficient* for its end, yet *Reason* must be presupposed to it: As I take *Reason* (which is nothing else but another part of *Gods word*) to be the *foundation* of *Religion*; so I take *Tradition* (which is the *Universal Consent* of those *Ages* immediately succeeding the *Apostles*, before the *Emperours* turn'd *Christian*) to be hugely serviceable, if not absolutely necessary to *inform* and *rectify* my *Reason*, as being the only means to convince *my Reason* of the *Divine* Authority of that *Book* we call the *Bible*: and I did not think my self bound to believe what is there declared, till I had *Reason* to think that *God* was the *Revealer*, otherwise it had not been *Faith*, but vain *Credulity*.

(7.) Therefore applying my self to the *Test* of *Tradition*, I became thereby convinc'd and perswaded, that the *Books* which we call the *Bible*, were the

only truly-divine Revelation, as they are numbered in the 6th. Article of Religion, set forth by the Church of England, 1562. So that by the care of those that lived at the Fountain-head of Christianity (God by his Providence so disposing and preserving it through all succeeding Ages) I came to know the *Word of God*: not knowing of any other way left to yeild me the like satisfaction.

(8.) Now being to be fully perswaded of the *Divine Authority* of the *Bible*, my next undertaking was to satisfy my self how I should come to understand the *Right Sense*, or be assured of the *true meaning* of the *Text*. That they are the *Words of God*, my *Reason* assents; and that which I was next to enquire after, was, how to be assured of their *true meaning*.

(9.) And first I concluded with my selfe Negatively, That the *Letter* alone was not a sufficient means to assure me of the *true Sense* of the *Scripture*. Since (not to insist, that if it should be denied in whole or in part (as most of the *Books* of the new Testament have been by some or other) the *Letter* could not evidence it self) the experience of so many erring thousands is a lamentable, but a convincing Proof of it. As to instance, let any unprejudiced Person set himself impartially to examine severally and by themselves, the Interpretations and Glosses, the *Independents*, *Presbyterians*, *Papists*, *Socinians*, &c. do severally give upon the *Letter* of the *Text*. And they shall every one fairly seem to give a likely *Sence* answerable to their several *Hyphothses* of their *Religion*; & perhaps, for ought as some (though uninterested) can collect from the *Letter*, only one possibly appears as probable as the other; And the *Reason* why each particular

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*Perswasion* so dearly espouses its own Interpretations, seems to be the primary *Tincture*, which (at first being imbibed for want of a more *Rational* Foundation) is uncontrollably retain'd for ever after, containing a prejudice against all other *Senses* whatsoever: And it cannot be denied, but every one of these are really persuaded of the truth of their own meaning, since they profess to reverence *Gods-Word* as much as any: read it frequently, study it diligently, quote it constantly, and zealously defend the sense which they conceive of it, so far; that many are even ready to die for it, notwithstanding they all contradict one another, and that in *Fundamental* Points.

(10.) Considering with my self the endless *Enthusiasms*, and *Popish Phanatisms* which are so furiously imitated by some amongst us, I was on the other side fully convinc'd, that the light of the *Private Spirit* alone was no infallible *Director* in this case neither, since we see by too too sad experience multitudes of those to differ one from another (as before) in essential points of *Religion*, as in the *Trinity* and *Godhead* of *Christ*, &c. and yet every one affirming, that they are inspired by that unerring *Light*, which leads them into all truth: and their Interpretations are all of them from the *evidence*, and *Demonstration* of the *Spirit*. Now the cause of all this seemed to me to be nothing else but their furious Rejecting of *Reason*, with the only means (in this case) to Rectify it, *viz. Tradition*, and their accepting instead thereof an inward *self-conviction* (which is nothing else but a sense or persuasion wrought gradually upon them by the strength of their several *Educations*) to be a sufficient persuasion to assure them  
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of the *Divine Authority* of *S. Scripture*, and of its *sense* too: which is extremely groundless and irrational, and the *Mahumetans* have as much to say for their *Alcoran* and *Religion*, as this comes to.

(11.) Neither the *Letter* of *Jeremias* his Prophecy, nor that Portion of the *Spirit* which *Daniel* had bestowed upon him was sufficient to make him understand the Number of the years there mentioned, but we find there was something else necessary, *Dan. 9. 2.* So that neither the *Letter*, nor the *Light* of the *private Spirit* alone being able to assure me of the true *sense* of *S. Scriptures*, there needs but *common Reason* to discern that the same *Rule* (which I had for the *Authority* or *Canon* of the *Word of God* it selfe, if it be sincerely followed according to *Right-Reason*) was the only sufficient means to assure me of its true *meaning* and *sense*. It appear'd to me greatly rational to receive the *sense* (as well as the *Words*) of *S. Scriptures* from those, that were either contemporary with, or immediately succeeded, the Apostles: And in all controversial points, this *Rule* hath proved to me the only satisfactory refuge I could ever yet meet with: It is the only means to convince my Judgment what Christ and his Apostles taught and practised, what was the Doctrine and Discipline of the Apostolick and Primitive Church.

(12.) This *Rule of Faith* (if I may so call the means to know the true *sense* of *S. Scripture*) will certainly convey down the true *Faith* unchang'd to all after Ages: By which *Touchstone* is to be tried, which is the true Church: For a Church is a Congregation of the *Faithful*, and the *Faithful* are those which have the true *Faith*; If the true *Faith* cannot be had without this



this *Rule*, then they only that have this *Rule* are the true *Church*.

(13.) Having found the *Rule of Faith*, there remain'd to find out which body of men in the World do follow this *Rule*: For those and only those (I conceived) could be assured of the true *meaning* and *sence* of *S. Scripture*, could only have the true *Faith*, could only be the *true Church*: My Zeal was on fier till I was satisfied that I was a member of that *Catholick Church*: whereas all the rest of men in the World (since they have but fallible grounds of their *Faith*) cannot have *true Faith*, but *Opinion* only.

(14.) I had a strong presumption, and indeed a firm assurance, that the *Church of England* doth hold her *Doctrine* and *Discipline* by this infallible *Tenure*, since She alone owns this *Rule*, and demonstratively proves, that she doth now stick by it; For I satisfied my self, that her *Doctrine* and *Discipline* (which she hath not been ashamed to confess, but to evidence to the open view of the World in her *Articles* and *Canons*) is squared according to the Testimony of the *Primitive Age*, and unmuddied Fountain of *Christianity*, and therefore I concluded her to be the *true Church*, and so to be posselt both of the true *Letter* and *sence* of *S. Scripture*. And if any particular *Text* be ambiguous, and perhaps not cleared by any *Primitive Writer*, She is in a capacity by the word written in her heart, viz. *Right Reason*, to assigne a *sence* agreeable to the *Rule of Faith*, being assisted by that infallible *Guide* which leads into all *Truth*.

(15.) Oh! how highly rational did it appear to me to bring the *sence* of *S. Scripture* (where it seems dubious) to the *Apostolick Primitive sence* and *Practice* rather.

ther then to make it *fadg* to any preconceived *Notion* whatsoever. By which very consideration, how easily might the fearful *fix* about *Controversiall Points* be avoyded, & how strangely short might the large *Debates* about the *meaning* of particular *Texts* become, and in what peace, quiet and Satisfaction might they end? What if the *Letter* of *S. Scripture* in the opinion of some doth seem as much to favour some other *Doctrine* or *Discipline*, as that of the *Church of England*: yet since it doth as *fairely* speak (if not more manifestly, as is unanswerably proved by *Judicious Hooker* in his *Ecclesiasticall Policy*) for that, as for any other among the *many* that are contended for: Methinks upon this very consideration, *she* might be allow'd to stand (if not upon higher) yet upon as even termes, as any of the *other*: But when I see the *Church of England* to write so neerly after the *Original Cappy*, to teach and practice the same things, which those *first* and *unmuddied times* did, *this, this* very consideration clearly turns the *Scale*, and so alters the *case*, that *she* (if but permitted to be weighed in the ballance of *common Reason*) would prove too pondrous for any *Rival*: there was never yet any pretended *Church*, that ever came in competition with her, but was found too light.

(16.) By the help of these Considerations, I became clearly sensible, that the eye of the understanding of those, that urge, that nothing ought to be established in the *Church of God* more then what is *positively*, or *interminis* commanded in the *S. Scriptures*, did look through a *fallacious Prospective*. Besides, the *Jewish Church* (the Particulars of whose Worship were so exactly particularized in their *Revelation*,  
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that with far greater reason, they might have pretended such an assertion) did not think it self bound up in such strict limits, as not to have power to recede from the *Letter* of their *Law*, and therefore (as occasion offered) did ordain and practice many things which their *Law* did not enjoyn, yet had the *open approbation* of *God* himself: As for instance (1) their Building of *Tabernacles*, (2) their hours of *Prayer*, (3) their *sections* of the *Law* and the *Prophets*, (4) their keeping the *Pasover*, 14 dayes by *Hezekias*, when as the *Law* enjoyned but 7 dayes, (5) their *feast of Purim* by *Esther*, (6) their *Feast of Dedication* by the *Maccabees*, (7) their *Fast* of 4, 5, and 10 months under the *Captivity*. (8) their use of *baptising* *Profelites*, (9) their *Washing of feet* before the *Pasover*, imitated by our *Saviour*, &c. These things considered; I knew not why the *Christian Church* should be deprived of the like *Priviledge*: Besides, there being many things, for which though there are no indisputably expresse texts, yet finding them allowed, enjoyned, and practised by the *Apostles*, or their *Immediate Successors*, I thought my self obliged to receive them, not knowing but they might have, nay *rationaly* concluding that they must have, *Divine Authority*: Such as, the *Change* of the *Sabboth* from *Saturday* to *Sunday*: the *Baptising* of *Infants*: the use of *Godfathers* and *Godmothers*, as *Stipulatores*: *Confirmation* *Publick Lythurges* (as the *Greek Lythurgie* composed by *St. Paul*; the *Indian* by *St. Thomas*: the *Ethiopian* by *S. Mark*: the *Muscovian* by *St. Andrew*, &c.) the *Observation* *Anniversary* of *Christs Nativity*, and of other *Feasts* and *Fasts*, the *Hierarchichall Policy* of *Church Government*, and the like.

(17.) As these Considerations have been helpful to build me up to a firm Settlement in Religion, so I have hopes, that they will have the like influence on all, unless it be either on those of Rome, or on others among our selves, who being brought up to a certain *Sett*, and addicted to a particular *Party*, have so irresistably espoused certain *Opinions*, that right or wrong they are resolved not to bring them to *this Test*: And such persons are in a dangerous condition: Strangers to Christianity, Turks and Infidells may sooner be perswaded to give a *Bill of Divorse* to their *whoring* after strang Inventions, and be sooner gayn'd to make use of their *Reasons* (the only *Disfrimination* between men and Bruites) then such as these.

Lastly, To conclude with the Resolution of a *Quere*, which (it may be, is here as necessary, as it) is likely to be made to the aforesaid Method, *viz*: If *Reason* be the *Foundation* of Religion, and *Tradition* be absolutely necessary to rectify it; how shall illiterate persons be satisfied, whose educations, and stations in the World, do incapacitate them to be informed by such means? The Answer is this, there is no man, though never so illiterate, if he will be true to himself, and lay aside all manner of prejudice of imbibed Principles, and Parties, &c. But will easily confess the aforesaid *Hypothesis* in general to be consentaneous to his *Reason*; and though he is not in a capacity himself to search *Tradition* for the truth of things, yet he must acknowledge that the only way left for his satisfaction, is to have recourse to that sort of People in the world (and to only them) that hold that *Method*: And (as I have before hinted) the Church of England are they, and only they, that build upon this Rational foundation. So that, that *Faith* is to be received from thence, which, being hatched by Gods *H. Spirit* in mens hearts, brought forth by *Reading*, cherished by *hearing of the Word*, sealed by *Baptism*, and strongly confirmed by their partaking of the *Sacraments*, will prove the only *Saving Faith*.

FINIS.